

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SILES ZUAZO RETURNS TO BOLIVIA; VICTOR PAZ REMAINS
IN US AND UNCOMMITTED

1. SUMMARY. FORMER BOLIVIAN PRESIDENT HERNAN SILES ZUAZO RETURNED TO BOLIVIA EARLY ON THE MORNING OF MARCH 4, GREETED BY THE LEADERS OF HIS PARTY, THE MNRI, AND A FEW LEADERS OF OTHER LEFTIST-ORIENTED BOLIVIAN POLITICAL PARTIES. SILES SAID HE WOULD FORM A POLITICAL FRONT TO BRING BOLIVIA FROM DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRACY. WITH HIS RETURN, PART OF THE OPPOSITION TO BANZER-BACKED CANDIDATE JUAN PEREDA SHOULD NOT BEGIN TO COALESCENK THE ONLY MAJOR POLITICAL FIGURES REMAINING OUTSIDE BOLIVIA ARE VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO AND WALTER GUEVARA. SOME OF PAZ' MNR FOLLOWERS CLAIM HE WILL RETURN FOR THEIR PARTY CONVENTION IN APRIL, AND INSIST HE MAY DECIDE TO BE A CANDIDATE IN BOLIVIA'S JULY ELECTIONS. OTHER MNR ADHERENTS, AFFILIATED WITH PEREDA, CLAIM THAT PAZ WILL EITHER BACK PEREDA, OR AT LEAST NOT OPPOSE HIM. IN ANY CASE PAZ WILL BE A PIVOTAL

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FIGURE AS THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN PROGRESSES. END SUMMARY.

2. AFTER SIX YEARS OF EXILE, FORMER PRESIDENT HERNAN SILES ZUAZO RETURNED TO BOLIVIA IN THE EARLY MORNING OF MARCH 4 ABOARD A FLIGHT FROM CARACAS. SILES WAS GREETED AT THE AIRPORT BY LEADERS OF THE MNRI (THE PARTY HE FOUNDED), REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MIR, DELEGATES FROM BOLIVIA'S TWO COMMUNIST PARTIES (THE MUSCOVITES

AND THE MORE EXTREME MARXIST-LENINISTS), AND MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY.

3. ON HIS ARRIVAL, SILES TOLD REPORTERS THAT HE HAD RETURNED TO "UNITE THE BOLIVIAN PEOPLE." LATER, IN A PRESS CONFERENCE AT THIS HOME, HE SAID HE WOULD DEDICATE HIMSELF TO THE FORMATION OF A POLITICAL FRONT THAT COULD BRING THE COUNTRY FROM "DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRACY". HE ADDED THAT SUCH A FRONT WOULD OPERATE WITHIN A DEMOCRATIC FRAMEWORK AND WOULD INCLUDE PARTIES WITH AN AFFINITY TO THE AIMS OF THE MNRI, SUCH AS THE MIR, PRIN, PDC, PRA, PS, AND THE COMMUNISTS.

4. COMMENT: WITH SILES ZUAZO BACK, IT IS LIKELY THAT AT LEAST PART OF THE OPPOSITION WILL BEGIN TO JELL, AND THAT HE WILL EMERGE AS ITS CANDIDATE. WHETHER THIS FRONT WILL INCLUDE SUCH DISPARATE ELEMENTS AS JUAN LECHIN OQUENDO'S PRIN (WHICH HAS BEEN FLIRTING WITH THE TROTSKYITES) AND MODERATE PARTIES LIKE THE PRA AND PDC, HOWEVER, REMAINS CONJECTURABLE.

5. THE ONLY IMPORTANT POLITICAL LEADERS NOW REMAINING OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY ARE PRA CHIEF WALTER GUEVARA ARCE AND THE MNR'S VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO. OF THESE TWO, PAZ IF BY FAR THE MORE INFLUENTIAL. LEADERS OF THE PAZESTENSSORISTA WING OF THE MNR HAVE TOLD US THAT PAZ WILL RETURN TO TAKE PART IN THEIR CONVENTION DURING THE FIRST PART OF APRIL. THEY INSIST HE MIGHT STILL BE A CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY, EITHER ON THE MNR TICKET OR AS HEAD OF A FRONT WHICH WOULD INCLUDE THE PRA (WITH WHICH THE PAZ-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ESTENSSORISTAS HAVE JUST FORMED AN ALLIANCE) AND OTHER MODERATE GROUPS OPPOSED TO GENERAL JUAN PEREDA, THE CANDIDATE BACKED BY PRESIDENT BANZER. ON THE OTHER HAND, MEMBERS OF THE MNR WING ALLIED TO PEREDA APPEAR EQUALLY CERTAIN THAT PAZ WILL TILT THEIR WAY, THUS EITHER ABANDONING THE PAZESTENSSORISTAS OR INDUCING AT LEAST SOME OF THEIR NUMBER TO JOIN THE PEREDA CAMP. WHILE IT SEEMS INCREASINGLY UNLIKELY THAT EITHER PAZ OR THE PAZESTENSSORISTAS WILL JOIN FORCES WITH SILES ZUAZO AND HIS FOLLOWERS, IT IS USEFUL TO KEEP IN MIND THAT THE MOST POPULAR CLICHE IN BOLIVIAN POLITICAL CIRCLES THESE DAYS IS THAT "ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE". BE REFRAINING FROM OFFICIALLY DECLARING HIS POSITION, PAZ, WHO STILL HAS A POPULAR IMAGE IN RURAL AREAS AND WITH LABOR, IS BECOMING A PIVOTAL FIGURE AS THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN PROGRESSES.
BOEKER

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